

Grant Road Bridge
Spanning Broad Branch Creek, on Grant Road at
the intersection with Broad Branch Road, NW
Rock Creek Park
Washington
District of Columbia

HAER No. DC-17

HAER
DC,
WASH.
566-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

GRANT ROAD BRIDGE

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Location: On Grant Road at the intersection of Broad Branch Road
spanning Broad Branch, Rock Creek Park, Washington D.C.

UTM: 18/32800/433440
Quad: Washington West

Date of Construction: ca. 1898

Engineer: Unknown

Present Owner: Rock Creek Park
National Capital Region
National Park Service
Department of the Interior

Present Use: Vehicular bridge

Significance: Grant Road Bridge is one of the earliest bridges located
in Rock Creek Park. Built during the late nineteenth
century, the bridge may have been one of the first built
with appropriations for the park.

Historian: Marcia M. Miller, 1988

After years of proposals, Rock Creek Park was created by an Act passed by Congress on September 27, 1890. Containing appropriations to purchase 1605.9 acres of land running along Rock Creek from the Maryland border to the Zoological Park to be preserved as a natural park, the act defined the purpose of the park as providing "for the preservation from injury or spoliation of all timber, animals, or curiosities within said park, and their retention in their natural condition as nearly as possible."¹ At the time, the United States government had designated only two other such areas as natural parks.² The Commissioners of the District of Columbia and Chief of Engineers of the United States Army jointly controlled the park (although at this time the military exercised more authority). Their duty was to lay out paths and roads for public use. After purchasing the land, however, Congress did not provide for any improvements to the park for the next seven years.

The park remained under the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park until 1918. At this time it became part of the National Park system in the District of Columbia and the duties were transferred to the jurisdiction of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds. The officer in charge of the park still reported to the Army Chief of Engineers. In 1925, the new Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital administered the Park after the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds was abolished. Then, in 1933 President Franklin Roosevelt abolished this office, along with the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission (established to complete a parkway along the lower end of the creek). The Office of National Parks, Buildings, and Reservations in the Department of the Interior (a temporary name for the National Park Service) gained control of the park at this time. Rock Creek Park thus became one of the National Capital Parks.

Since Congress did not appropriate money for work within the park, chain gangs (comprised of District prisoners) completed the improvements to paths and roads. In 1898, Congress finally approved funding to create a road running the length of the park. Beach Drive followed the natural course of the path along the creek.³ This became, and remains today, the main thoroughfare through the park. There were, however, several older roads intersecting the park. Grant

¹Mackintosh, Barry. Rock Creek Park An Administrative History. History Division, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 1985, p. 17.

²ibid. Yellowstone and Sequoia National Parks were the first to be designated as such.

³Beach Drive is named in honor of Col. Lansing H. Beach, Army Corps of Engineers, U.S.A. who served as Secretary of the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park and later as the Bridge Commissioner for the District of Columbia. He is responsible for the early improvements to Rock Creek Park.

Road runs from Broad Branch Road to Glover Road and crosses Broad Branch.⁴ This road connected with old Military Road. The first reference to the present structure is found in the Commissioners Report of 1898. In this report, George H. Bailey's, Engineer of Bridges, noted that a "new masonry culvert was built over Broad Branch at the junction of Broad Branch road and the portion of the Military road leading southwest toward Tennallytown."⁵ The same report lists expenditures of \$480,48 for a masonry culvert at the intersection of Broad Branch and Military Roads.⁶ This would make the bridge one of, if not the earliest extant bridge built in Rock Creek Park.

The structure is a stone arch bridge, with a ten foot span and twenty-one feet wide. The interior of the arch is lined with brick. The stone is partially granite, a native stone of the creek, as is part of the footings. There is a keystone located at the center of the arch ring on both sides of the bridge. The downstream side is more irregular in the placement of the granite compared to the other stone.

Repairs are scheduled for 1989 or 1990. Major work will involve rebuilding a broken and settled wing wall on the west (upstream) side. Repointing of mortar joints is also planned.

Unlike later bridges erected in Rock Creek Park, the Grant Road Bridge is truly a masonry structure. Despite its modest size and appearance this bridge manages to impart the type of rustic design and appearance which later bridges in the park could only imitate, utilizing stone facing on more modern structural systems.

⁴Glover Road was long known as Ridge Road. Mackintosh, 1985, p. 22.

⁵Report of the Engineer of Bridges, Washington, DC, located in the Report-District of Columbia Commissioners, 1897-1898, v. 2, p. 83. According to the maps in the Washingtoniana Collection of the Martin Luther King, D.C. Public Library, the portion of Military Road mentioned in the Commissioners Report is the same as present-day Grant Road. See: "Washington and Suburbs, District of Columbia Showing Permanent System of Highways" (map 1902w) and "Map of the District of Columbia Showing Location of Schools" (map 1904d).

⁶ibid., p. 84.

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